



Department of Justice

United States Attorney's Office District of North Dakota

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 10, 2009

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nd/>

CONTACT: JULIE HOUGH

PHONE: (701) 297-7400

FAX: (701) 297-7425

Washington State Man Sentenced to Life in Prison for Leading the Largest Drug Conspiracy at Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation

FARGO - Acting United States Attorney Lynn Jordheim announced today that on November 10, 2009, **Miguel Angel Chavez**, a/k/a Jesus Aurelio Valdez, a/k/a Antanacio Chavez, a/k/a Jesus Aurelio Chavez, a/k/a Jesse Valdez Munoz, a/k/a Tony, a/k/a Gordo, from the state of Washington, was sentenced before United States District Court Judge Ralph R. Erickson on charges of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and distribute a controlled substance, money laundering conspiracy, conspiracy to use a communication facility to facilitate the distribution of a controlled substance, distribution of a controlled substance, conspiracy to commit identity theft, and continuing criminal enterprise. Judge Erickson sentenced **Chavez** to life in prison.

On April 22, 2009, **Chavez**, 33, appeared in U. S. District Court and entered an open plea of guilty to count one of the indictment charging conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and distribute a controlled substance. At that time, **Chavez** continued his not guilty pleas as to counts two through seven of the indictment. On May 26, 2009, after a 3-week trial, **Chavez** was found guilty by a 12-person jury on the remaining six

-more-

counts, specifically finding that 10,000 grams or more of methamphetamine was involved in the continuing criminal enterprise.

The jury found that **Chavez** conspired to possess with intent to distribute and distribute controlled substances, used a communication facility to facilitate the distribution of controlled substances, and distributed methamphetamine or aided or abetted the distribution of methamphetamine. The jury further found **Chavez**, in furtherance of the continuing criminal enterprise, organized, supervised, or managed five or more individuals.

According to the evidence adduced at trial, the **Chavez** organization imported over 150 pounds of methamphetamine into North Dakota from Mexico and Eastern Washington. The financial investigation revealed that Chavez stole the identities of people to facilitate his drug trafficking and money laundering scheme. The organization used bank accounts and money wires to conceal the hundreds of thousands in illegal proceeds generated by the organization.

“Drug trafficking is a crime that revolves around money,” according to Julio LaRosa, Acting Special Agent in Charge for IRS-Criminal Investigation in the St. Paul field office. “Criminal investigation plays a unique role in federal law enforcement’s war on narcotics by following the money trail and putting the financial evidence together to unravel the large drug trafficking organizations.”

Twenty three co-defendants were also indicted in this drug conspiracy. The majority of them have been sentenced or are awaiting sentencing. This is the largest drug conspiracy case the U.S. Attorney's Office has prosecuted on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation.

"The dismantling of this organization has a tremendous impact on the flow of drugs into the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation and the price of methamphetamine has increased as a result," stated Assistant U. S. Attorney Chris Myers.

The case was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, and the Department of Homeland Security.

Assistant United States Attorneys Chris Myers, Jennifer Klemetsrud Puhl, and former U.S. Attorney Drew Wrigley prosecuted the case.

-end-